

“A Person of Silence”: Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter of Exhortation Sent to Someone Who Left Judaism and Came to the Life of Perfection**

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Philoxenos of Mabbug (died 523), a keen theologian and prolific ascetic author who adhered to the Christology of Cyril of Alexandria, was known as a staunch defender of the anti-Chalcedonian cause in Syria and Mesopotamia.¹ He was named the metropolitan of Mabbug (Hierapolis, modern Membiji) in 485, a position he held until 519. There is no clear indication that he himself received a monastic formation or lived in a monastery, even though the later Syriac historiographical tradition wished us to believe so and associated him with the prestigious monastic center of Qartamin in Tur Abdin.² However, his close relations with central monasteries in Tell ‘Ada, Beth Gaugal, Amida, and Palestine are well traced. Philoxenos wrote extensive ascetic discourses and letters, and a considerable part of his epistolary *œuvre* was intended for a monastic audience – including both monastic communities and individuals in Palestine, Syria, and Mesopotamia.³

This article deals with one of Philoxenos’ minor letters, sent to a monk who converted from Judaism to monastic life, and it presents the original Syriac text which until now was unavailable to students of Syriac Christianity. This letter, entitled “Letter of exhortation sent to someone who left Judaism and came to the life of perfection,” is preserved in a single manuscript, British Library Add. 14,726.⁴ Until now the letter was known to scholars only in a French translation by Micheline Albert and an Italian translation by Sabino Chialà.⁵

In his *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum*, William Wright, dates the manuscript Add. 14,726 to the tenth century, on the basis of the form of its script, West-Syrian Serto.⁶ This codex of West-Syrian origin contains a collection of

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¹ For a general overview of Philoxenos’ life, works and theological stance, see A. de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog. Sa vie, ses écrits, sa théologie* (Louvain: Imprimerie orientale, 1963). A useful bibliographic guide to Philoxenos’ *œuvre* has been provided recently by D. A. Michelson, “A Bibliographic Clavis to the Works of Philoxenos of Mabbug,” *Hugoye* 13:2 (2010), pp. 273-338. See also the bibliography provided by R. A. Kitchen, *The Discourses of Philoxenos of Mabbog: A New Translation and Introduction* (Cistercian Studies Series 235; Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013).

² De Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog*, pp. 22-25.

³ For a survey of the letters to monastic communities, see de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog*, pp. 187-223, 254-274.

⁴ See description of the manuscript in W. Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum, Acquired since the Year 1838*. 3 vols (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1870-1872), vol. 2, pp. 828-831. For a brief discussion of this letter, see de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog*, pp. 265-266.

⁵ M. Albert, “Une lettre inédite de Philoxène de Mabboug à un Juif converti, engagé dans la vie parfaite,” *L’Orient Syrien* 6 (1961), pp. 41-50; S. Chialà, *Filosseno di Mabbog. I sensi dello Spirito: Lettera a un suo discepolo, Lettera parentica a un ebreo diventato discepolo* (Testi dei Padri della Chiesa 48; Monastero di Bose: Qiqajon, 2000), pp. 23-30.

⁶ Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts*, vol. 2, p. 828.

As its title indicates, Philoxenos addressed the letter to an individual who “left Judaism”¹¹ and “came to the life of perfection,” that is, became a monk. Unfortunately, the text of the letter provides no further information about this person. The question arises whether this Jewish addressee of Philoxenos should be considered a fictional character or not. In favor of the former scenario is the fact that a Jewish interlocutor was often used as a straw figure in *Adversus Judaeos* literature, especially in dialogues. In addition, conversion of the Jews constitutes a recurrent and popular theme in the Christian literature of late antique Syria and Mesopotamia, especially in hagiographical compositions.¹²

Nevertheless, we believe that in this particular case we are dealing with a real person, someone who converted from Judaism to Christianity. There are several considerations that speak against the fictional nature of Philoxenos’ addressee. Given that this letter does not belong to the *Adversus Judaeos* genre and features no anti-Jewish polemic, from the literary point of view there is no need to introduce a Jewish character. Furthermore, whereas there are many examples of stories of Jews converting to Christianity that can be safely discarded as being the result of a literary *topos* at work, one can hardly deny that there are some genuine cases of Jews from the Eastern provinces of the Roman empire embracing the new religion during the period of Late Antiquity. For instance, in the fourth century we hear that Jerome studied Hebrew in the desert of Chalcis in Syria from “a certain brother who had once been a believer among the Jews”.¹³ Closer to the time of Philoxenos, the anti-Chalcedonian writer John Rufus (5th-6th cc.), recalls the story of the conversion by Peter the Iberian of a certain Jewish girl named Eugenia in the Phoenician city of Tyre during the

¹¹ For the verb ܦܠܝܚܘܢܝܘܫܘܬܐ, we prefer the meaning “left” to the more technical “converted from”. Cf. the title of another letter by Philoxenos, addressed to a novice, – “Letter to a man, who has recently left the world” (ܦܠܝܚܘܢܝܘܫܘܬܐ ܦܠܝܚܘܢܝܘܫܘܬܐ); ed. G. Olinder, *A Letter of Philoxenos of Mabbug Sent to a Novice* (Göteborgs Högskolas Årsskrift 47.21; Göteborg: Elanders Boktryckeri Aktiebolag, 1941), p. 1.

¹² Cf. *Acts of Thomas* 8-9 (tr. A. F. J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas: Introduction, Text, and Commentary* [Supplements to Novum Testamentum 108; 2nd rev. ed.; Leiden: Brill, 2003], pp. 39-42); *Teaching of Addai* (ed. G. Howard, *The Teaching of Addai* [SBL Texts and Translations 16, Early Christian Literature Series 4; Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1981], p. ܐ [Syr.], p. 69 [tr.]); *Judas Kyriakos Legend* (ed. H. J. W. Drijvers and J. W. Drijvers, *The Finding of the True Cross – The Judas Kyriakos Legend in Syriac: Introduction, Text and Translation* [CSCO 565, Subs. 93; Louvain: Peeters, 1997], p. 48 [Syr.], p. 68 [tr.]); *Life of Rabbula* (ed. J. J. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri, Rabulae episcopi Edesseni, Balaei aliorumque opera selecta* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1865], pp. 193-195); *Acts of Mar Mari* (ed. A. Harrak, *The Acts of Mār Mārī the Apostle* [SBL Writings from the Greco-Roman World 11; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005], pp. 66-67); *Life of Mar Awgen* (ed. P. Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum*. 7 vols [Paris / Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1890-1897], vol. 3, pp. 414-418); *Martyrdom of ‘Abd al-Masih of Singar* (ed. J. Corluy, “Acta sancti Mar Abdu’l Masich, aramaice et latine, edidit nunc primum ex cod. Londinensi (Addit. mss. 12174),” *Analecta Bollandiana* 5 [1886], 5-52); *Life of Aaron of Serug* (ed. F. Nau and L. Leroy, *Les légendes syriaques d’Aaron de Saroug, de Maxime et Domèce, d’Abraham, maître de Barsôma, et de l’empereur Maurice; Les miracles de Saint Ptolémée* [Patrologia Orientalis 5.5 [25]; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1910], pp. 709-710).

¹³ *Ep.* 125.12.1; ed. I. Hilberg, *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi epistulae. Pars 3: Epistulae CXXI–CLIV* (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 56.1; Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996), p. 131.

second half of the fifth century.¹⁴ What makes the case of Eugenia particularly interesting is not only the chronological closeness of her case to our letter, but also that, like the addressee of Philoxenos, she not only converts to Christianity, but embarks on the monastic way of life.

Finally, to the genuinely Jewish origin of the recipient of Philoxenos' letter may testify also the fact that in this work, which as a whole is devoted to ascetic teachings, the bishop finds it necessary to address, though briefly, the theme of the Church as the new or true Israel. In §12 Philoxenos gives his communication a personal touch by praising his addressee, whom he describes as belonging to "Israel by name" and to "the lineage of the seers of God according to the flesh," for joining the "True Israel," i.e. the Christian Church. According to Philoxenos, by doing so the new member of the Christian community gains the double benefit of enhancing and in fact redeeming his old "carnal" lineage through the new "spiritual" one.

Philoxenos develops this theme by drawing a basic dichotomy between "Israel by name" (ܩܘܘܠܐ ܕܝܫܪܐܝܝܠ) and "True Israel" (ܩܘܘܠܐ ܕܝܫܪܐܝܝܠ ܫܘܝܝܡ). The notion of the Christian Church as the "New" or "Spiritual" or "True" Israel that replaced the "Old" one is an old and recurrent theme in the repertoire of the Christian theology of supersessionism.¹⁵ It is found *in nuce* already in the New Testament corpus, in the letters of Paul.¹⁶ In explicit form, it appears during the second century in the writings of Justin Martyr, who in his construction of Christianity as the new people of God claims that "we (i.e. Christians) are the true people of Israel" (Ἰσραηλιτικὸν τὸ ἀληθινὸν ἐσμὲν γένος).¹⁷ Later on, in the third century, Origen employs similar phraseology to describe the Church.¹⁸ It is noteworthy, however, that although the theology of supersessionism has a great variety of expressions in the works of Syriac

¹⁴ *Life of Peter the Iberian* 154; ed. C. B. Horn and R. R. Phenix, *John Rufus: The Lives of Peter the Iberian, Theodosius of Jerusalem, and the Monk Romanus* (SBL Writings from the Greco-Roman World 24; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), pp. 226-229. For a discussion of this story, see B. Rosen, "An Apostate Jewess from Tyre: The Abbess of a Monophysite Monastery South of Caesarea," *Cathedra* 61 (1991), pp. 54-66 [in Hebrew]; C. B. Horn, "Anti-Jewish Polemic and Conversion of Jews to Anti-Chalcedonian Asceticism in the Holy Land: The Case of Eugenia of Tyre," *ARAM* 18-19 (2006-2007), pp. 33-48.

¹⁵ For a general presentation, see R. R. Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), pp. 124-165; M. Simon, *Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (AD 135-425)*, trans. by H. McKeating (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1996), pp. 76-97.

¹⁶ Cf. Gal 6:16; Rom 9:6; Eph 2:12; 1Cor 10:18. See P. Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church* (Society for New Testament Studies, Monograph Series 10; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), esp. pp. 70-206.

¹⁷ *Dial.* 135.3; ed. M. Marcovich, *Iustini Martyris Dialogus cum Tryphone* (Patristische Texte und Studien 47; Berlin-New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), p. 304. Cf. also *Dial.* 11.5, 130.3. For a discussion of this aspect of Justin's approach to Christian identity, see D. K. Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 94-115.

¹⁸ Cf. *Hom. in Jos.* 15.1 – *ecclesiam Domini, quae est verus Istrahel*; ed. W. A. Baehrens, *Origenes. Homilien zum Hexateuch in Rufins Übersetzung, Teil 2: Die Homilien zu Numeri, Josua und Judices* (Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte 29, Origenes Werke 7; Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1921), p. 382.

Christian writers from Late Antiquity,¹⁹ this particular formula based on the dichotomy “True Israel” and “Israel by name” does not seem to be attested before the time of Philoxenos. Thus we do not find it in the *Demonstrations* of Aphrahat or in the corpus of Ephrem’s genuine writings. Neither does it appear in such important Syriac works of anti-Jewish polemic as the *Homily against the Jews* by Isaac of Antioch (5th c.) or the *Homilies against the Jews* by Jacob of Serug (6th c.). Of course, the limitations imposed by the only partial survival of the corpus of anti-Jewish polemical literature in Syriac prevent us from claiming so with certainty, but it might well be that Philoxenos was the first Syriac author to make use of this polemical trope.

Yet, it is noteworthy that while Philoxenos does resort to this basic supercessionist dichotomy, in his case it is devoid of any negative connotations. On the contrary, he deploys it in order to commend his addressee’s choice and to present his Jewishness in a distinctively positive way. In §§12-14, Philoxenos draws a picture of the spiritual disposition of the Jews embracing Christianity, which seems to be unique in Syriac literature from Late Antiquity. Evoking the Pauline imagery of “branches” and “grafting” from Romans 11, Philoxenos ensures the convert that his “Israelite lineage” makes him particularly well-positioned to advance in the way of spiritual progress, due to “an even greater power to perceive the benefits of Christ” aroused in him by “the Lord of election”. He, thus, has a double advantage of adding spiritual to carnal, so that his bodily descent from “the lineage of the seers of God (ܟܠܠܐ ܟܠܠܐ)” amplifies his mystical experience as seer of God in the Christian sense.²⁰

Philoxenos expresses a positive attitude towards his addressee’s ethnic background by characterizing the Jewish race as that of the “seers of God”. In doing so, the bishop relies on the etymological interpretation of Jacob’s epithet “Israel” from Genesis 32:28 as “one who sees God”. This exegetical tradition originated in the Jewish Hellenistic circles and could be found in the works of Philo of Alexandria and other Jewish authors.²¹ It was adopted by Christian exegetes at quite an early point, so that one can see this interpretation enjoying a considerable popularity among the Greek-speaking writers from the second century onwards.²² In the Syriac-speaking

¹⁹ For examples and discussion, see R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 56-68; J. Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism: The Christian-Jewish Argument in Fourth-Century Iran* (Studia Post-Biblica 19; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971), pp. 158-175; S. Minov, *Syriac Christian Identity in Late Sasanian Mesopotamia: The Cave of Treasures in Context* (Ph.D. dissertation; The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2013), pp. 123-167.

²⁰ Cf. phrases ܟܠܠܐ ܟܠܠܐ (§17) and ܟܠܠܐ ܟܠܠܐ (§23), used to describe the ultimate goal of ascetic’s efforts.

²¹ Cf. *Leg.* 3.38, 3.186; *Post.* 92; *Fug.* 208; *Mut.* 81; *Abr.* 57. Cf. also the Jewish Hellenistic prayers, incorporated into the *Apostolic Constitutions* (7.36.2). For a discussion, see C.T.R. Hayward, *Interpretations of the Name Israel in Ancient Judaism and Some Early Christian Writings: From Victorious Athlete to Heavenly Champion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 156-193.

²² Cf. Melito, *Peri Pascha* 82; Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 1.9; Origen, *Comm. in Cant.*, *Prologue* 3, *De princ.* 4.3.12; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Praep. ev.* 7.8.28, 11.6.31; Cyril of Alexandria, *Glaph. in Gen.* 2. See Hayward, *Interpretations of the Name Israel*, pp. 330-351.

milieu, this etymology is attested, besides Philoxenos, in several other sixth-century works.²³

As to Philoxenos' view of spiritual life, it is worth recalling that the idiosyncratic terminology and ascetic theory of the Syriac *Book of Steps* (ca. 4th c.) and of Evagrius Ponticus are embedded in his major ascetic writings. He followed the distinctive spirituality of the *Book of Steps*, which discerns two Christian lifestyles, divided according to their level of virtuous life: the "Upright" (ܐܘܪܝܬܐ) who follows the minor commandments and the "Perfect" (ܐܘܪܝܬܐ) who adheres to the major commandments. Perfection is imitation of the model of Christ, and consists of renunciation of the world and all possessions, fasting every day, continuous prayer, humility, and becoming a stranger to the world.²⁴ As Sebastian Brock has pointed out, Philoxenos is considered the most important author to follow the bipartite theory of the *Book of Steps*.²⁵ This is most apparent in Philoxenos' monastic discourses, in which he built on this theory, and emphasized that it is impossible to attain perfection without withdrawing from the world, renouncing wealth, and adopting self-denial.²⁶ In the letter to the converted monk, however, Philoxenos does not use this idiosyncratic terminology of the *Book of Steps*.

It is equally important to accentuate that Philoxenos showed himself to be "a student of Evagrius," as recognized by modern scholarship, even though he used the teaching of his master in a prudent way, as has been demonstrated by Antoine

²³ It appears in several Syriac biblical onomastica, some of which could be traced back to the 6th c.; see F. Wutz, *Onomastica Sacra. Untersuchungen zum Liber Interpretationis Nominum Hebraicorum des Hl. Hieronymus*. 2 vols (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der althristlichen Literatur 41.1-2; Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1915), vol. 2, pp. 796, 804, 820. Cf. also the Syriac translation of Cyril's *Glaphyra* by Moses of Inghilene, preserved in mss. BL Add. 14555 and Vatican Syr. 107.

²⁴ See, for example, *Book of Steps*, *Mēm̄rā* 19; ed. M. Kmosko, *Liber Graduum* (Patrologia Syriaca 1.3; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1926), cols. 496, 513; English trans. R. A. Kitchen and M. Parmentier, *The Book of Steps: The Syriac Liber Graduum, translated with an Introduction and Notes* (Cistercian Studies Series 196; Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 2004), pp. 199, 206. For a summary of the fundamental expectations from the Upright and the Perfect, see Introduction in Kitchen and Parmentier, *Book of Steps*, pp. xxxviii-xlvi. For the dynamic of this two levels of Christians, see P. Bettiolo, "Confessare Dio in perfetta spogliazione. La via del discernimento dei comandamenti nel *Liber Graduum*," *Cristianesimo nella Storia* 19 (1998), pp. 631-651.

²⁵ S. P. Brock, "Some Paths to Perfection in the Syriac Fathers," *Studia Patristica* 51 (2011), pp. 77-94 (esp. p. 83). Likewise, Kitchen stressed (*Book of Steps*, p. xxvii) that "Philoxenos is the only Syriac author who exhibits the apparent influence of the *Liber Graduum*."

²⁶ Philoxenos, *Discourses*, ed. by E. A. W. Budge, *The Discourses of Philoxenos Bishop of Mabbôgh, A.D. 485-519. Edited from Syriac Manuscripts of the Sixth and Seventh Centuries, in the British Museum, with an English Translation*, 2 vols (London: Asher & Co., 1983-1894); a recent English translation by Kitchen, *Discourses of Philoxenos of Mabbug*. On the influence of the *Book of Steps* on Philoxenos' ascetic theory, see, for example, *Discourses*, *Mēm̄rā* 8; ed. Budge, *Discourses of Philoxenos*, vol. 1, pp. 222-224, 237-238; trans. Kitchen, *Discourses of Philoxenos*, pp. 176-178, 188; Cf. Evagrius, *On Thoughts* 26: "It is not possible to acquire knowledge without having made the first, the second, and the third renunciation..." Eng. trans. R. E. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus: Translation, Introduction, and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 172.

Guillaumont and others.²⁷ Robin Darling Young has discussed the influence of Evagrius' monastic thought on Philoxenos, apparent in the subject of the imitation of Christ,²⁸ and Robert Kitchen has convincingly pointed out that the imprint of the Evagrian method is sewn into all of Philoxenos' writings.²⁹ Such is not the case, however, in this letter, which does not reveal the internalization of the Evagrian terminology and ascetic theory. Rather, in the letter to the converted monk Philoxenos has transmitted his ascetic teaching in general terms, common in the ascetic discourse of late antique Syriac Christianity. Moreover, Perfection (*teleiotes*) was not Evagrius' preferred concept for framing his ascetic teaching, but it turns out to be imperative in Philoxenos' ascetic theory and a pivotal concern in his message to the converted monk.

Philoxenos' letter to the converted monk is a minor document, relatively meager in ascetic teachings, in comparison, for instance, with his ascetic *Discourses*, and his letters to novices and monks in various monasteries.³⁰ The letter's most ascetic quality is stillness (ܥܠܡܐ), and its main goal is knowledge of the divine and perfection (ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ). He framed his ascetic discipline here in bipartite terms, that is, "two ways" (ܥܘܠܡܐ ܥܘܠܡܐ), two roads, corporeal labors and spiritual thoughts. He combined this bipartite scheme with Matthew 7:14: "The gate is narrow and the way is strait," that is, the narrow road of bodily labors (ܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ), the road of hard labors (ܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ) and the strait path of spiritual thoughts. This notion was not new in the fifth century.³¹ The author of the *Book of Steps*, in the longest *Mēmṛā* 19, addressed to the "one who wishes to become a solitary (ܥܘܠܡܐ ܥܘܠܡܐ),"

²⁷ See A. Guillaumont, *Les 'Képhalaia Gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique et l'histoire de l'origénisme chez les Grecs et chez les Syriens* (Patristica Sorbonensia 5; Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1962), pp. 207-213; P. Harb, "L'attitude de Philoxène de Mabbug à l'égard de la spiritualité "savante" d'Évagre le Pontique," in: F. Graffin (ed.), *Mémorial Mgr Gabriel Khouri-Sarkis (1898–1968), fondateur et directeur de L'Orient Syrien, 1956–1967* (Louvain: Imprimerie orientaliste, 1969), pp. 135-155; idem, "Les origines de la doctrine de la 'lā ḥašūšūtā' (apatheia) chez Philoxène de Mabbug," *Parole de l'Orient* 5 (1974), pp. 227-241. For a recent discussion on the way Philoxenos integrated in his writings the Evagrian teachings, see D. A. Michelson, *The Practical Christology of Philoxenos of Mabbug* (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 82-112.

²⁸ R. D. Young, "The Influence of Evagrius of Pontus," in: R. D. Young and M. J. Blanchard (eds.), *To Train his Soul in Books: Syriac Asceticism in Early Christianity* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), pp. 157-160, 166-175.

²⁹ Kitchen, *Discourses of Philoxenos*, Introduction, p. lxix.

³⁰ See, for example, G. Olinder, *A Letter of Philoxenus of Mabbug Sent to a Novice* (Göteborgs Högskolas Årsskrift 47.21; Göteborg: Elanders Boktryckeri Aktiebolag, 1941), pp. 1-20.

³¹ The binary tradition in early Christianity reflects almost exclusively ethical and apocalyptic teachings, see the *Epistle of Barnabas* (18-21), in which teaching and authority are described in terms of two ways, using the imagery of light and darkness. Cf. the *Didache* 1, life/death, and the *Shepherd of Hermas*, Mandate 6.36: "There are two angles with man, one of righteousness and one of wickedness." For the Jewish biblical context and in the Dead Sea Scrolls, see R. A. Kraft, "Early Developments of the 'Two-Ways Tradition(s),' in Retrospect," in: R. A. Argall, B. A. Bow, and R. A. Werline (eds.), *For a Later Generation: Transformation of Tradition in Israel, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2000), pp. 136-143.

already depicted the ascetic lifestyle as a narrow and difficult road of perfection by drawing on Matthew 7:14.³² Philoxenos cherished this metaphor in his *Discourses*, one of his major ascetical treatises, composed probably during his episcopate.³³ He discussed there the imagery of the narrow door (ܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܝܢܐ) and related it to the notion of tasting the way of Christ and entering the kingdom of God, which corresponds to his statement in the letter to the converted monk, in which Christ figures as knowledge, saying: “The one who considers thoroughly and begins with knowledge, at the end will attain wisdom” (§2). According to him, one should eliminate from himself every sensation (ܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܝܢܐ) of the world’s tastes, and uproot evil and dissoluteness. In this passage Philoxenos is more specific about ascetic conduct than in the letter to the converted monk, elucidating that “unless gluttony has died, asceticism cannot live in us.”³⁴ In this context he used as well the Pauline imagery of the old and new person for denoting the transitory stage from lust to death of vices, perceiving the performance of asceticism as a rebirth.³⁵ Through asceticism, he expounded, the scars of the old person are cleansed and scoured. Thus: “The beauty of the new person is being revealed ... then it is for it to see and be seen in the beauty of its soul, because from here it receives the garment of knowledge.” The beginning of asceticism is bitter and harsh, he said, but “its conclusion is pleasant and sweet ... it is the narrow door (ܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܝܢܐ) that ushers one into the expansive realm of the spiritual.”³⁶ And further along in this *Discourse* he stated: “The road that leads to life is small and narrow” (ܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܝܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܝܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܝܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܝܢܐ).³⁷

In his *Discourses* Philoxenos enhanced the Pauline theology of taking off the old person (ܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܝܢܐ) through baptism and putting on the new person (ܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܝܢܐ). The mystery one receives in baptism operates only in the name of faith, yet when one desires to take off the old person through his own labor and fatigue, he becomes aware of it not only through the hearing of faith, but “by an authentic experience of spiritual knowledge” (ܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܝܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܝܢܐ) and through ascetic practices, such as pure prayer and continual supplication, suffering and tears.³⁸

³² *Book of Steps*, *Mēmrā* 19; ed. Kmosko, *Liber Graduum*, col. 447-453; trans. Kitchen and Parmentier, *Book of Steps*, pp. 183-185. See also, *Mēmrā* 29; ed. Kmosko, *Liber Graduum*, col. 852; trans. Kitchen and Parmentier, *Book of Steps*, p. 336; *Mēmrā* 30; ed. Kmosko, *Liber Graduum*, col. 921; trans. Kitchen and Parmentier, *Book of Steps*, p. 360. On the “narrow gate of Perfection (ܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܝܢܐ)” (Mt 7:13), see also *Mēmrā* 2 ed. Kmosko, *Liber Graduum*, col. 28; trans. Kitchen and Parmentier, *Book of Steps*, p. 13. On the typology of the road in the *Book of Steps*, see Kitchen and Parmentier, *Book of Steps*, pp. lxvi-lxvii.

³³ This is de Halleux’s suggestion (*Philoxène de Mabbog*, p. 288). For a survey of the various suggestion for dating the *Discourses*, see Kitchen, *Discourses of Philoxenos*, pp. xxxiv-xxxv.

³⁴ *Discourses*, *Mēmrā* 11; ed. Budge, *Discourses of Philoxenus*, vol. 1, pp. 420-421; trans. Kitchen, *Discourses of Philoxenos*, p. 328.

³⁵ *Discourses*, *Mēmrā* 11; ed. Budge, *Discourses of Philoxenus*, vol. 1, p. 422; trans. Kitchen, *Discourses of Philoxenos*, p. 329.

³⁶ *Discourses*, *Mēmrā* 11; ed. Budge, *Discourses of Philoxenus*, vol. 1, p. 423; trans. Kitchen, *Discourses of Philoxenos*, p. 330.

³⁷ *Discourses*, *Mēmrā* 11; ed. Budge, *Discourses of Philoxenus*, vol. 1, p. 492; trans. Kitchen, *Discourses of Philoxenos*, p. 384-385.

³⁸ *Discourses*, *Mēmrā* 9; ed. Budge, *Discourses of Philoxenus*, vol. 1, pp. 267-268; trans. Kitchen, *Discourses of Philoxenos*, p. 210.

Philoxenos believed that unless one has departed from the world, shed the entire corporeal way of life (ܩܘܕܫܐ ܩܘܕܫܐ), and emptied himself of everything in it, “he is not able to attain this knowledge in order to become aware (ܩܘܕܫܐ) of the majesty of these things given mysteriously by Christ.”³⁹ In this context Philoxenos shows himself an astute reader of Evagrius, explaining that when a person has taken off the world and renounced everything visible, then he begins to take off evil passions (ܩܘܕܫܐ): lust, fornication, gluttony, intemperance, insatiableness, and drunkenness.⁴⁰

In the *Letter* to the converted monk Philoxenos rather restricted his ascetic teaching and language to several elementary ascetic practices that he could easily cast in the context of conversion, all the while presenting the ascetic lifestyle as a rebirth. A comparison of the *Letter* with the *Discourses* and other letters intended for novice monks who had newly adopted the monastic discipline reveals that in the letter to the converted monk Philoxenos merely provides an outline of his ascetic theory—fusing the Pauline notion of conversion with asceticism and perfection—which he fully developed in the *Discourses*.⁴¹ Yet, unlike the *Letter*, in the *Discourses* he draws clearly on the bipartite theory of the *Book of Steps* and uses the terms Upright and Perfect, and associates the way of uprightness with the road of the world, and perfection with the road beyond the world.⁴²

One of Philoxenos’ favorite ascetical themes in this letter is stillness: physical stillness, stillness of the mind (§8) and stillness of thoughts (§16), distinctions that he used as well in his *Letter to Patricius*, written after the letter to the converted monk and the *Discourses*, sometime around 500-505.⁴³ Exterior stillness (ܩܘܕܫܐ ܩܘܕܫܐ) leads to stillness of the mind, which raises a person up to conversing with God, for which Philoxenos also used the metaphor of the sweet taste of the one “who senses that he has tasted that sweetness of flavor,” inducing him to “ascend and recline at the table of the opulence of the fruits of divine knowledge” (§7). In *Discourse* 11 he likewise used the image of flavor: “The beginning of asceticism is bitter and harsh, but its conclusion is pleasant and sweet,” concluding that “it is the narrow door that ushers one into the expansive realm of the spiritual.”⁴⁴ In another passage Philoxenos expanded on the spiritual, an invisible stage, describing it as a space in which there is only stillness (ܩܘܕܫܐ) and quiet, where one will taste something that he cannot taste

³⁹ *Discourses, Mēmrā* 9; ed. Budge, *Discourses of Philoxenus*, vol. 1, p. 268; trans. Kitchen, *Discourses of Philoxenos*, p. 211.

⁴⁰ *Discourses, Mēmrā* 9; ed. Budge, *Discourses of Philoxenus*, vol. 1, p. 269; trans. Kitchen, *Discourses of Philoxenos*, p. 212.

⁴¹ See, for example, *A Letter of Philoxenus of Mabbug Sent to a Novice*, edited by G. Olinder (Göteborgs Högskolas Årsskrift 47.21; Göteborg: Elanders Boktryckeri Aktiebolag, 1941). In this letter Philoxenos introduced a mode of conduct for the soul, body, and the mind, listing the well-known passions such as lust, laughter, and remembrance of former friends.

⁴² *Discourses, Mēmrā* 8; ed. Budge, *Discourses of Philoxenus*, vol. 1, p. 224; trans. Kitchen, *Discourses of Philoxenos*, p. 177.

⁴³ ܩܘܕܫܐ ܩܘܕܫܐ. Literally: “stillness of place”. For this phrase, see Philoxenos, *Letter to Patricius*; ed. R. Lavenant, *La lettre à Patricius de Philoxène de Mabboug* (Patrologia Orientalis 30.5; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1963), pp. 58, 60 [Syriac], pp. 59, 61 [trans.]. For the date of the *Letter to Patricius*, see De Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog*, p. 259.

⁴⁴ *Discourses, Mēmrā* 11; ed. Budge, *Discourses of Philoxenus*, vol. 1, p. 423; trans. Kitchen, *Discourses of Philoxenos*, p. 330.

with the physical palate, and he will sense something that is not apparent to corporeal senses.⁴⁵

Needless to say, there is nothing unique about integrating the ideal of stillness in Late Antique ascetic discourse, nor in perceiving the practice of stillness as the beginning of the monastic life.⁴⁶ However, in the letter to the converted monk Philoxenos accentuated the imperative of stillness, stressing that one can discover the “seal of spiritual image” only in stillness (§5, 6, 8). This occurs, Philoxenos elucidated, through the imageless experience of the mind, once the corporeal image is removed from the person’s mind and it becomes silent from all agitations, assuming that “each one of us is by nature a person of silence.” It is unclear what Philoxenos means by the phrase “by nature a person of silence.” Nevertheless, he used it while drawing a distinction between two levels of awareness of the new man: All person vest Him by grace, he explained, yet not all of them feel the grace “because although our clothing of the new man comes through grace, the sensation (ⲕⲁⲗⲁⲓ ⲓⲛ) of this gladness comes through labour” (§9). Further, he phrased the notion of two levels of awareness by using two sorts of stillness, the exterior and the interior, together with self-emptying (§16); thus from the level of the “spiritual man” who converses with the Lord one can be elevated to the “perfect conversation with the knowledge,”⁴⁷ that is, with Christ, toward the vision of God, “face to face” (§16). In other words, Philoxenos merged the notion of sensation of baptism with his theory of asceticism, in which the exercise of stillness is predominant. This mold, a sort of ultimate conversion or rebirth of the monk, is well articulated in Philoxenos’ *Discourses*. For example:

Jesus was born again by baptism and from the belly of the law he received a spiritual place ... in this pattern everyone who desires to become a perfect disciple of Christ, when one has left the world and is living outside of it, is born again from physical world to the spiritual world ... from a multitude of friends to solitude ... from the corporeal⁴⁸ mode of life to the spiritual mode of life (ⲕⲁⲓ ⲕⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲛ ⲁⲓⲛ ⲁⲓⲛ ⲁⲓⲛ), from a conversation with a human being to a conversation with God, from [one kind of] knowledge to [another kind of] knowledge, and from [one] path to [another path].⁴⁹

⁴⁵ *Discourses Mēmrā 9*; ed. Budge, *Discourses of Philoxenus*, vol. 1, p. 289; trans. Kitchen, *Discourses of Philoxenos*, p. 227.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Evagrius, *The Foundations of the Monastic Life: A Presentation of the Practice of Stillness*, PG 40:1252-1264; Eng. trans. R. E. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus: Translation, Introduction, and Commentary* (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 4-11. In this minor treatise, which enjoyed wide circulation and is extant in three Syriac versions, Evagrius gives simple advices in simple language on how to take up the solitary life. It is “the banality of its content,” according to Antoine Guillaumont (*Un philosophe au désert*, pp. 177-180), probably explains its large diffusion.

⁴⁷ See also, *Discourses, Mēmrā 11*; ed. Budge, *Discourses of Philoxenus*, vol. 1, pp. 469-471; trans. Kitchen, *Discourses of Philoxenos*, pp. 366-367. Here Philoxenos explains that spiritual knowledge is the kingdom of heaven, received in the soul after the victory over physical passions.

⁴⁸ Kitchen translated here “physical”.

⁴⁹ *Discourses, Mēmrā 9*; ed. Budge, *Discourses of Philoxenus*, vol. 1, pp. 258-259; trans. Kitchen, *Discourses of Philoxenos*, pp. 204-205. See also *Mēmrā 9*; ed. Budge, *Discourses*

From the holy Philoxenos of Mabbug: Letter of exhortation sent to someone who left Judaism and came to the life of perfection

1. Until now I expected that Your Dearness would write me first, because it is proper that goodness shall descend from those who are above to those who are down below. However, since the great ones, who are established in the elevation of goodness, resemble God, like Him they lower themselves to receive worthless gifts of the humble ones.
2. As to ourselves, whereas to greet you would be to our advantage and, furthermore, we would thus also repay our debt, above all it was my joy upon hearing about your achievements that has urged me to write. For you have begun well, and we hope that your ending will be similar to your beginning. Indeed, the plant that at the beginning exhibits wholesomeness and beauty, as a promise of many fruits, gives to those who observe it the hope that it will reach its consummation. And the one who considers thoroughly and begins with knowledge, at the end will attain wisdom.
3. For there are two ways by which a man journeys toward God – the narrow way of corporeal labours and the strait path of spiritual thoughts. And while he who proceeds is one, yet his journey manifests itself in two forms, in accordance with what the word of our Saviour has demonstrated to us: “The gate is strait and the way is narrow”.⁵⁵ And he made the way narrow and the gate strait so that a man would behold the subtle knowledge of the mysteries of Christ only after he proceeds by the way of hard labours, in order that his knowledge would be attained through labours and not through words. For words always beget (only) words, and if a man shall proceed in search of the knowledge of Christ through words – it is only words that he will find in front of him.
4. For the one who in labours and afflictions proceeds in search of this knowledge, the knowledge itself will be revealed and make itself apprehensible to him, and lead him to ascend and elevate him to its highest degrees, and make him worthy of being the chosen lot. For when the afflictions bring him close to the knowledge and the labours draw him to the meaning of wisdom, it is the knowledge of Christ that receives him as a good nursemaid, while demanding from him a fineness of thoughts in addition to the previous afflictions of limbs.
5. As it is burdensome for the limbs to abandon their corporeal life, likewise it is toilsome for the thoughts to lay aside [their] gross and carnal impulses. And as a person does not vest in virtue unless he first takes off his pleasure of flesh, likewise the mind is not able to put on the wonder⁵⁶ of spiritual knowledge unless it strips itself of and throws away the shadow of the memory of the world. As someone may say, unless the corporeal image has completely vanished from the person’s mind, he will not receive the seal of the spiritual image.
6. This (i.e. the spiritual image), however, is discovered in stillness, which, as I have heard, you love. For you have taught me that stillness is cherished by you more than anything else, so that I would know that you felt Christ by means of it. For if a person

⁵⁵ Mt 7:14. The wording of Philoxenos’ quote corresponds to that of the *Peshitta* version. Cf. *Discourses, Mēmrā* 11; ed. Budge, *Discourses of Philoxenus*, vol. 1, p. 492; trans. Kitchen, *Discourses of Philoxenos*, p. 384.

⁵⁶ On “wonder” (ⲉⲓⲟⲗⲁ) in Philoxenos as a “step toward knowing Christ through the wonder of the incarnation,” see Young, “Influence of Evagrius”; Michelson, *Practical Christology*, pp. 149-150.

does not understand the word of a sage, he will not cherish his companionship; and if a person does not feel first the power of the knowledge of the love of Christ, he will not cherish stillness that brings close to Him.

7. For the desire for the companionship of a sage in someone is brought forth by two things: either by that he feels the power of his words or by that he loves to learn. And, again, on account of two things a person, who for the sake of God becomes separated from the world, chooses for himself that stillness:⁵⁷ either because he has attained the state of limpidity of the mind that perceives God, or because he has heard from others about this goodness and hastened to obtain it. Indeed, one who senses that he has tasted that sweetness of flavour – it induces him who has tasted (its) bounty even a little bit, with the tip of (his) little finger, to ascend and recline at the table of the opulence of the fruits of divine knowledge.

8. Stillness of place (i.e. physical stillness)⁵⁸ leads one into (a state of) stillness of the mind, and stillness of the mind raises a person up to converse with God. For even if a person has ceased from having companionship with one, he is not (yet) going to converse with another.⁵⁹ Therefore, as long as the mind does not become silent from all agitations of the worldly commotion, it will not begin to stammer in the conversation with God.

9. For each one of us, in fact, is by nature a person of silence. But those who were deemed worthy put on the new man in the baptism of spirit. And while we (all) put (him) on, there are those who feel it and those who do not. Because although our clothing of the new man comes through grace, to feel it (i.e. the grace) is (the result) of joyful labour.

10. And he who, through afflictions and labours, takes pains to strip off the whole old man then the whole of the new man reveals itself in him. He who cuts off and throws away only one of his members, feels another new (member) that grows up in him, corresponding to the old one that has been cut off. And some have two, five, or ten (i.e. new members), each one according to his diligence. And, corresponding to those (members) that have been cut off, the other new ones grow up in their place, according to the perseverance of that one in whom they are renewed. For the apostle teaches us that one has to strip off completely the whole of the old man, together with all his habits, and to put on the new one, who is renewed after the image of his Creator.⁶⁰

11. You then strove well to feel the new man, whom you have put on, and not like the others who buried him inside them, and their old man became a grave for the new man that they put on in the waters (of baptism). And he does not live in them, does

⁵⁷ An alternative translation: “a person chooses for himself that stillness, which, for the sake of God, separates (one) from the world”.

⁵⁸ See above **note 43**.

⁵⁹ The precise meaning of this sentence is far from certain. It seems to convey the idea that even if an ascetic has reached the state of physical stillness this does not enable him to converse with God, without first reaching the state of stillness of the mind.

⁶⁰ Cf. Col 3:9-10. Contrary to his handling of these Pauline verses in the *Commentary on Matthew and Luke*, the wording of Philoxenos’ paraphrase in this case stands closer to that of the Peshitta version. See B. Aland and A. K. Juckel, *Das Neue Testament in syrischer Überlieferung. Bd. II: Die Paulinischen Briefe, Tl. 2: 2. Korintherbrief, Galaterbrief, Epheserbrief, Philipperbrief und Kolosserbrief* (Arbeiten zur neutestamentlichen Textforschung 23; Berlin–New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), pp. 432-434.

not feel, does not turn around, and does not care for anything that belongs to him, as someone dead in the grave does not do any of these (activities).

12. Indeed, it is good that from Israel in name (only) you have become true Israel. Belonging to the lineage of the seers of God also according to the flesh, you have further added spiritual to carnal, so that you would be related to this lineage in double measure. For carnal is worthless without spiritual. Yet if faith comes in, he – the one who without it would be despised and ignominious above all men – is honoured through it more than anyone else, for it is spirit that operates body, which without it is worthless.

13. So, with it (i.e. faith) you will be honoured doubly, according to the testimony of Paul that was spoken about that race, from which you are according to nature: “How much more may they be grafted back into their natural olive tree!”⁶¹ As to myself, I am convinced that if a man like you, who converted from that Israelite lineage comes – in addition that he becomes greatly dear to the Lord of election – there is also aroused in him an even greater power to perceive the benefits of Christ. And this life that does not manifest its working in the dead ones, namely, those who are circumcised, manifests itself in this very man, whether in great love or in the vision of the knowledge.

14. And if I would (try to) explain the mystery of why it is thus, I would not be able. I only understand that it is thus, whether on account of the blessed apostles or from the rest of those from this lineage who became disciples of Christ.

15. You should admit, therefore, and believe that even in what concerns this virtue that you have proved yourself to love stillness, and to perceive the ministry of the Spirit, which is not common in our days and found only among a few, the grace manifested itself to you superabundantly.

16. And, again, if you persist in this exterior stillness,⁶² as well as that of thoughts, together with self-emptying⁶³ of thought from anything that appears to the eye, and are confined in (your) mind, and, furthermore, the afflictions serve to strengthen your weak body, you will be rightfully counted worthy to converse with the Lord. From this stammering, with which your spiritual man is occupied now, you will be elevated lovingly to the perfect conversation with the knowledge, toward that vision, which is face to face, according to what Paul said: “Now we see as if in a mirror, but then face

⁶¹ Rom 11:24b. The wording of the quote corresponds to that of the Peshitta version. The only significant difference is the addition of the adverb ܕܠܗܘܢܗܘܢ, which appears also in the Harklean version. See B. Aland and A. K. Juckel, *Das Neue Testament in syrischer Überlieferung. Bd. II: Die Paulinischen Briefe, Tl. 1: Römer- und 1. Korintherbrief* (Arbeiten zur neutestamentlichen Textforschung 14; Berlin–New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), p. 230.

⁶² Literally: “stillness of place” (ܠܗܘܢܗܘܢ ܠܗܘܢܗܘܢ).

⁶³ “Self-emptying” (ܠܗܘܢܗܘܢ ܠܗܘܢܗܘܢ); cf. Phil 2:7, where it is said that Christ “emptied himself” (ܠܗܘܢܗܘܢ ܠܗܘܢܗܘܢ). For this term in early Syriac tradition, see, for example, the *Book of Steps*, *Mēm̄rā* 13; ed. Kmosko, *Liber Graduum*, col. 316; trans Kitchen and Parmentier, *Book of Steps*, p. 131: “If he desires to become perfect, he [must] empty himself, become celibate and abandon everything and become attached to our Lord”; *Mēm̄rā* 12; ed. Kmosko, *Liber Graduum*, col. 285: “Brethren, since we believe that there is a hidden self-emptying (ܠܗܘܢܗܘܢ ܠܗܘܢܗܘܢ) of the heart ... it is right that we should empty ourselves in the body too of our possessions and inheritance.”

to face,”⁶⁴ in accordance with the word of our Saviour, who said: “blessed are those who are pure in their heart, for they shall see God”.⁶⁵

17. Purity of body, however, which rejects only the desires, does not see God, whereas the purity of heart, <which is from the hidden stirrings, is able to see God>, according to the testimony of God himself.⁶⁶

18. For the purity of body brings closer the purity of heart, and the purity of soul observes God, because the corporal desires are channels and doors that introduce passions to the soul. And he who toils and overcomes the desires of the body blocks these same channels through (his) endurance. And from there the soul finds peace from its tumults, because the causes of its agitation have been revealed, and it begins to approach the limpidity of the joy of the new man, who has been purified, and the vision of the mind that observes those things that are situated above it (i.e. the soul).

19. As the eyes of the body are raised toward the soul, so the eyes of soul are raised toward the spiritual goods that are situated above it. And just as the body easily attends the soul when it has been released from the fetters <of the world>,⁶⁷ likewise, once the soul has released itself from the bonds of corporal desires, it readily attends the spiritual mysteries which are suspended above it.

20. Because in the same manner as the soul is close to the body and mingled with it, even though there are bodies that do not feel it, likewise these spiritual things are allied and mingled with the soul, even though there are souls that do not feel them. In fact, there are bodies that feel the soul only for the sustenance of their needs. And there are souls that feel only the enticements of the words of knowledge of the mysteries, and do not love their substance, but merely the shadow of their knowledge. For they are novel words that arise from them (i.e. the mysteries) and converse by means of the thoughts of the soul.

21. Turn, therefore, always to the right side and behold! – Christ stands at your side as a present image. Likewise, the spiritual man ought all the time to draw before his face an image of Satan standing continuously at the left side, and Christ at the right. For behold, on this mighty side stands Christ, by whose power we ourselves in the natural disposition of (our) limbs always lean over toward the right side, because on this side stands our Helper, as David revealed to us through the word of Spirit that was in him: “He was at my right hand, so that I shall not be shaken”.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ 1Cor 13:12. The wording of the quote corresponds to that of the Peshitta version. The only significant difference is the omission of the phrase ܩܕܝܫܐ. See Aland and Juckel, *Das Neue Testament in syrischer Überlieferung. Bd. II: Die Paulinischen Briefe, Tl. 1*, p. 439, who give several alternative renderings of this verse in Philoxenos’ corpus.

⁶⁵ Mt 5:8. The wording of the quote coincides with that of the Old Syriac (Curetonian) version. See G. A. Kiraz, *Comparative Edition of the Syriac Gospels: Aligning the Sinaiticus, Curetonianus, Peshîttâ and Harklean Versions*. 4 vols (New Testament Tools and Studies 21.1-4; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), vol. 1, p. 49.

⁶⁶ Cf. *Book of Steps, Mēm̄rā* 19.24; ed. Kmosko, *Liber Graduum*, col. 493; trans Kitchen and Parmentier, *Book of Steps*, p. 198: “This is the Perfect road: ‘Blessed are those who are pure in their heart, for they shall see God’” (Mt 5:8).

⁶⁷ Although the main text has ܩܝܕܐ, we have decided to follow the scribal emendation in the margin, since the phrase “the fetters of the world” (ܩܝܕܐ ܕܐܝܘܒܐ or ܩܝܕܐ ܕܡܝܘܢܐ) is a standard feature of Philoxenos’ ascetic vocabulary. Cf. *Discourses* 4, 8, 9; ed. Budge, *Discourses of Philoxenus*, vol. 1, p. 78, ln. 19-20; p. 233, ln. 8-9; p. 294, ln. 3.

⁶⁸ Ps 16:8b. The wording of the quote corresponds exactly to that of the Peshitta version. See D. M. Walter, A. Vogel and R.Y. Ebied, *The Old Testament in Syriac according to the*

22. I have written these to your love not in order to teach you – for that would be audacious if it would come to my thoughts – but (because) I know that you would love to listen to a discussion of your labours, which in fact are (already) natural to you. I have written down a few of these (things) that I heard in conversation and sent to you, as a man who extols the king by his words, does not add to him purple or another diadem by his praise, but glorifies the greatness that he (already) possesses.

23. And furthermore, let my letter to you bring about the abundance of perpetual benefit, and may it also be agreeable to you and to everyone of the same spirit, so that they would listen to and learn from every person. For even if (in fact) they do not learn, they however ought to believe that they are learning, so that through this same thought the former (teaching) would be preserved and the latter would be added to, and through humility the soul would be sanctified, as well as it would be deemed very worthy of seeing God. Behold, I have written to you so that you would write me, and not be using a pretext, as it was until now.

24. And I adjure you by Jesus, the God whom you love, that whenever you pray remember my humble self and inquire after the welfare of everyone who confesses that Christ is God, one of the Trinity, and that he suffered and died for us. So that for his dispensation towards us glory and praise are due to him and to his Father and to the Holy Spirit to the ages of ages. Amen.

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